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Reception of biblical discourse in Africa

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The articles published in this special collection of *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* were subjected to a rigorous blind peer review process in accordance with the required academic standard set for this journal and the Department of Higher Education and Training. Authors in this special collection engage on the topic of the reception of biblical discourse in Africa from various perspectives, by applying different hermeneutical lenses. African biblical scholars, particularly those taking their points of departure from postcolonial, translational, black theology and decolonial theories, as well as scholars within social sciences, have argued that the Christian corpus of literature that was produced during 'Christianisation', 'Colonisation' and 'Civilisation' through the technology of conversion and assimilation of the '*damnés*' is a colonial product. Thus, it is in reading such texts that the reader has to contend with the colonial project embodied in these texts. At the same time, it is imperative that the reader also recognises that he or she is also a product of the colonial matrix of power.

The various layers of biblical discourse functioned as technology of power, epistemic privilege, standardisation and normativisation of the Western Christian norms. Thus, written word became not only a form of communication, but rather a tool of identity construction, and morphing of the indigenous concepts into biblical concepts. At the same time, through memoirs, biographies, letters, journals and sermons, the missionaries engaged in biblical discourse using biblical imagery to construct in the mind of the reader and listener a particular image of the *damnés*. Recognising these texts and hymns as discursive acts at work in Christian communities as commentary on a primary narrative imported from and exported to Europe requires enquiry into the colonialist agenda of which these are products, not only in order to subvert and expose, to decolonise, but also to move beyond their decolonisation.

The articles in this special collection apply various theoretical lenses in their analysis of biblical discourse in South Africa. Mothoagae's (2022) article locates biblical discourse in the 1840 sermon by Robert Moffat preached in front of the London Missionary Society (LMS) directors. He argues that in his sermon, Robert Moffat uses biblical imagery to 'other' the land and those that occupy it (Batswana). Mothoagae (2022) analyses the 1840 sermon by R. Moffat, and argues that through his sermon Moffat engaged in biblical discourse and performed epistemic privilege in his exposition of the Batswana to his audience, namely the directors of the LMS. At the same time, he used biblical texts and imagery to create in the mind of his listeners an image of heathenism and uncivility. According to Mothoagae (2022), Moffat further locates the Batswana within the realm of the *damnés*. Masoga (2022), in his article titled, 'Debriefing hermeneutics for a balanced reading of the biblical text', argues that the current hermeneutical approaches of promoting ancient biblical texts are not only imaginable but also too ambitious. He argues that the Hebrew Bible emerged from an Israelite cultural context, which neither speaks to nor deliberates on issues concerning the African cultural contexts. Masoga (2022) engages the existing hermeneutical contributions in order to propose a balanced reading of the biblical text. The article engages into a dialogue following hermeneutical approaches, which are popular among most African scholars, namely African biblical hermeneutics, black biblical hermeneutics, contextual biblical hermeneutics, feminist hermeneutics and oral hermeneutics.

Mdingi (2022) argues that during the late 1960s, the FBI, a United States intelligence agency, developed a counterintelligence programme famously known as COINTELPRO to surveil, misinform, misdirect and subvert and/or destroy black 'subversive' militant groups. The main intention of COINTELPRO was to 'prevent the rise of a messiah who could "unify, and electrify, the militant black nationalist movement"' (Mdingi 2022:1 of 6). This view is of significance for a number of reasons. Firstly, there seems to be a clear understanding, at least from the intelligence agencies, of the socio-political implications of a messiah that can be linked to apocalyptic expectation of occupied Israel in the 1st century. Secondly, the undertones of a messiah emerging from the poor and disfranchised seem to be the main stimuli for messianisms. Thirdly, the role

played by intelligence agencies is historical within the Christian tradition and paradigms of liberation that underscore the messiah, especially a comparison of the rudimentary intelligence surveillance (incomparable to the 20th century) and counterintelligence played by the priestly class in monitoring the mission of Christ. Furthermore, the image of a lowly messiah is associated with madness and lunacy, which is an interesting feature in how white racism has associated medically and otherwise madness as a characteristic of black revolutionaries. As such, Mdingi (2022) engages the role of messianism and militancy in black/African Christianity while highlighting biblical reception and African affectivity.

Williams (2022) engages the impact of prosperity theology and its implications for socio-economic development in Africa. She argues that prosperity gospel as part of Pentecostal Christianity, with its origins from the United States of America, presents itself as a new model for poverty eradication. Yet, at the same time, Williams (2022) maintains that it is in its use of biblical discourse that it erodes the valuable indigenous resources available within African religious communities, which emphasise community, positive family attachments, social support networks, moral values and accountability, to fight poverty; and examines the implications this has for socio-economic development in Africa. In spite of the proliferation of Pentecostal churches in Africa, Pentecostal Christianity has not translated Africa to a more prosperous continent and sub-Saharan Africa is still notably one of the poorest regions of the world. Poverty within the African context is defined largely in terms of deprivation and not just a lack of income. It is a concept with many dimensions that attempts to ascertain the varying degrees of deprivation experienced by populations, individually or collectively. However, certain subjective and sometimes arbitrary interpretations of biblical texts on prosperity as the basis for the prosperity theology, have encouraged capitalist impulses that often supplant the pursuit of spiritual advantages leading instead to an increase in crimes including robbery, financial fraud, kidnapping, ritual killings and many other social vices. The article by

Williams (2022) examines the different perspectives of the prosperity gospel, the biblical sources, and interpretations used as well as its interpretation of poverty. It shows how the prosperity theology, with its own interpretation of poverty, erodes the valuable indigenous resources available within African religious communities, which emphasise community, positive family attachments, social support networks, moral values and accountability, to fight poverty, and examines the implications this has for socio-economic development in Africa.

Lastly, Senokoane (2022) engages the reception of biblical discourse in Africa. He argues that as a form of technology of power, the transmission and reception of the Bible in Africa was successfully used as a spell to control an unsuspecting or a bewitched African believer. He further maintains that the Bible has been treated as a 'holy' book that cannot be questioned, translating into insanity, irrationality and magicality. To achieve a successful witchcraft, institutionalisation became critical to identify those who do not belong or classified as 'heathens'. The article uses the logic of Gabriel Setiloane to argue that Africans still believe in the Bible and Christianity because they are simply bewitched.

These articles grapple with the notion of biblical discourse from various perspectives, and as such draw attention to the need for theological and biblical sciences to decolonise in order to critically engage with the social and epistemic location of the Global South.

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